

IN THE CLAIMS

1. (currently amended) A method for indicating expert availability to a help-seeker from a pool of experts currently in communication with a client system - server system, said method comprising the steps of:

connecting the client system to the server system;

providing a database within the server system comprising a pool of available experts with corresponding expert information including at least one area of expertise and biographical data of each expert, wherein an available expert is an expert currently in communication with the client system, the experts pool further comprising identification of experts and their availability for providing immediate help to the help-seeker;

displaying information on the client system identifying alternative paths for assistance to the user, the alternative paths include at least one of an educational path and an expert assistance path, the educational path includes information from a plurality of sources, the expert assistance path includes access to the pool of available experts stored in the database;

receiving from the help-seeker through the client system, after the help-seeker has selected the expert assistance path, a request for at least one available expert;

searching the database to match the help-seeker request with at least one of an area of expertise and biographical data of each expert within the pool of available experts;

retrieving at least one available expert with corresponding expert information satisfying the database search;

displaying on the client system to the help-seeker at least one available expert with corresponding expert information that satisfies the help-seeker's request, the expert information further includes expert availability information displayed through an applet downloaded from the server system and a help history, the expert availability information includes an expert

availability indicator that displays a waiting time for each available expert displayed and an average amount of time the expert spends assisting a help-seeker, the help history displays a summary of prior communications between the help-seeker and available experts;

prompting the help-seeker to select at least one available expert from the display based on the expert information and the expert availability information; and

contacting the selected expert through the client system via at least one of instant messaging, on-line meeting, and on-line chat.

2. (original) A method according to Claim 1 wherein said step of displaying expert information on the client system further comprises the step of displaying photographs of the available experts within the expert pool.

3. (original) A method according to Claim 1 wherein said step of displaying expert information on the client system further comprises the step of displaying testimonials for the available experts within the expert pool.

4. (previously presented) A method according to Claim 1 wherein displaying a help-history summarizing prior communications between the help-seeker and available experts includes a description of each prior matter submitted by the help-seeker to an available expert, a resolution of each matter submitted, a date each matter was submitted, and a status of each matter submitted.

5. (original) A method according to Claim 1 wherein said step of displaying expert information on the client system further comprises the step of displaying length of service for the available experts within the expert pool.

6. (original) A method according to Claim 1 wherein said step of displaying expert information on the client system further comprises the step of displaying areas of expertise of the available experts within the expert pool.

7. (original) A method according to Claim 1 wherein said step of displaying expert information on the client system further comprises the step of displaying previous customer interactions with the available experts within the expert pool.

8. (original) A method according to Claim 1 wherein said step of displaying expert information on the client system further comprises the step of displaying which experts within the expert pool are free and which experts are helping other users.

9. (original) A method according to Claim 1 wherein said step of displaying expert information on the client system further comprises the step of displaying which experts within the expert pool are free and which experts are helping other users through an expert availability indicator displayed on the client system.

10. (previously presented) A method according to Claim 9 wherein said step of displaying expert information through an expert availability indicator further comprises the step of displaying availability information through an applet implemented through a well known programming language including at least one of Java, C, and C++.

11. (previously presented) A method according to Claim 9 wherein said step of displaying expert information through an expert availability indicator further comprises the step of tracking expert availability.

12. (original) A method according to Claim 11 wherein said step of tracking expert availability further comprises the steps of:

tracking experts availability;

tracking users who are interested in contacting a specific expert;

tracking an amount of time each user has been waiting to connect with the specific expert; and

displaying the expert availability on the client system.

13. (previously presented) A method according to Claim 1 wherein said step of contacting the selected expert further comprises the step of using user input into a user interface to select a free expert or join a queue of an expert currently helping another user.

14. (previously presented) A method according to Claim 13 wherein said step of contacting the selected expert further comprises the step of using user input to select a free expert or join a queue of an expert currently helping another user after having previously selected the queue of a different expert.

15. (previously presented) A method according to Claim 1 wherein said step of contacting the selected expert further comprises the step of selecting an expert based on a keyword match.

16. (original) A method according to Claim 15 wherein said step of selecting an expert based on a keyword match further comprises the step of analyzing a user's request against the expertise and biographical data of available experts.

17. (currently amended) A system for indicating expert availability to a help-seeker, through an applet, from a pool of experts, said system comprising:

a server system;

a client system configured with a browser, said client system connected to said server system; and

a database comprising at least one of an educational path component and an expert assistance path component, the educational path component includes information from a plurality of sources and the expert assistance path component includes an expert pool of available experts with corresponding expert information including at least one area of expertise and biographical data of each expert, wherein an available expert is an expert currently in communication with the client system, the expert pool further comprising identification of experts and their availability for providing immediate help to the help-seeker, said server system configured to receive from

the help-seeker through the client system, after the help-seeker has selected the expert assistance path, a request for at least one available expert;

search the database to match the help-seeker request with at least one of an area of expertise and biographical data of each expert within the pool of available experts;

retrieve at least one available expert with corresponding expert information satisfying the database search;

display on the client system to the help-seeker at least one available expert with corresponding expert information that satisfies the help-seeker's request, said expert information further comprises expert availability information displayed through an applet and a help history, said expert availability information comprises an expert availability indicator that displays a waiting time for each available expert displayed and an average amount of time said expert spends assisting a help-seeker, said help history displays a summary of prior communications between the help-seeker and available experts; and

prompt the help-seeker to select at least one available expert from the display based on said expert information and said expert availability information.

18. (original) A system according to Claim 17 wherein said expert pool database further configured with photographs of the available experts.

19. (original) A system according to Claim 17 wherein said expert pool database further configured with testimonials for the available experts.

20. (original) A system according to Claim 17 wherein said expert pool database further configured with biographical data of the available experts.

21. (original) A system according to Claim 17 wherein said expert pool database further configured with length of service for the available experts.

22. (original) A system according to Claim 17 wherein said expert pool database further configured with areas of expertise for the available experts.

23. (original) A system according to Claim 17 wherein said expert pool database further configured with specific customer previous interactions with the available experts.

24. (original) A system according to Claim 17 wherein said expert pool database further configured to cause said server system to show a user which experts are free and which experts are helping other users on said client system.

25. (original) A system according to Claim 24 wherein said expert pool database further configured to allow said client system to cause said server system to select a free expert or to join a queue of an expert currently helping another user.

26. (original) A system according to Claim 25 wherein said expert pool further configured to allow said client system to cause said server system to select a free expert or join a queue of an expert currently helping another user after having previously selected the queue of a different expert.

27. (original) A system according to Claim 25 wherein said expert pool database further configured to allow a user to engage an expert by exchanging textual messages.

28. (original) A system according to Claim 25 wherein said expert pool further configured to allow a user to engage an expert by telephone.

29. (original) A system according to Claim 17 wherein said server system configured as a server system for a network of client devices.

30. (previously presented) A system according to Claim 29 wherein said server system and said client system are connected via a network, and said network is at least one of a wide area network, a local area network, an intranet, and the Internet.

31. (previously presented) A system according to Claim 17 wherein displaying a help-history comprises a description of each prior matter submitted by the help-seeker to an available expert, a resolution of each matter submitted, a date each matter was submitted, and a status of each matter submitted.

32. (original) A system according to Claim 17 wherein said server system is further configured to select an expert based on a keyword match after analyzing a user's request against the expertise and biographical data and other information including correspondence record of chat sensors of the available experts.

33. (original) A system according to Claim 17 wherein said server system is further configured to display which experts within the expert pool are free and which experts are helping other users.

34. (original) A system according to Claim 17 wherein said server system is further configured to display which experts within the expert pool are free and which experts are helping other users through an expert availability indicator displayed on the client system.

35. (original) A system according to Claim 34 wherein said server system is further configured to display availability information through an applet implemented in at least one of a well known programming languages such as Java, C, and C++.

36. (original) A system according to Claim 17 wherein said server system is further configured to track expert availability.

37. (original) A system according to Claim 36 wherein said server system configured to display expert availability is further configured to:

track expert availability;

track users who are interested in contacting a specific expert;

track an amount of time each user has been waiting to connect with the specific expert;
and

display the expert availability on the client system.

38. (original) A system according to Claim 17 wherein said server system further configured to contact an expert based on user input into the client system.

39. (original) A system according to Claim 38 wherein said server system further configured to use user input from a user interface to select a free expert or join a queue of an expert currently helping another user.

40. (original) A system according to Claim 17 wherein said server system further configured to contact an expert based on user input from the client system to select a free expert or join a queue of an expert currently helping another user after having previously selected the queue of a different expert.